Buddhism at a Distance  The Buddhist monk Xuanzang returns to the Tang capital Chang'an from Tibet in 645, his ponies laden with Sanskrit texts. (Fujita Art Museum)

- What is the importance of Inner and Central Asia as a region of interchange during the Tang period?
- What were the effects of the fracturing of power in Central Asia and China?
- How did East Asia develop between the fall of the Tang and 1200?
- To what extent do shared practices justify thinking of East Asia as a unified cultural region in the post-Tang era?
INNER AND EAST ASIA, 600–1200

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The Early Tang Empire, 618–755
Rivals for Power in Inner Asia and China, 600–907
The Emergence of East Asia, to 1200
New Kingdoms in East Asia
Diversity and Dominance: Law and Society in China and Japan
Environment and Technology: Writing in East Asia, 600–1200

The powerful and expansive Tang Empire (618–907) ended four centuries of rule by short-lived and competing states that had repeatedly brought turmoil to China after the fall of the Han Empire in 220 C.E. (see Chapter 5). Tang rule also encouraged the spread of Buddhism, brought by missionaries from India and by Chinese pilgrims returning with sacred Sanskrit texts, as depicted in the scene that begins this chapter. The Tang left an indelible mark on the Chinese imagination long after it too fell.

According to surviving memoirs, people could watch shadow plays and puppet shows, listen to music and scholarly lectures, or take in less edifying spectacles like wrestling and bear baiting in the entertainment quarters of the cities that flourished in southern China.
under the succeeding Song* Empire. Song-stories provided a novel and popular entertainment from the 1170s onward. Singer-storytellers spun long romantic narratives that alternated prose passages with sung verse.

Master Tung's Western Chamber Romance stood out for its literary quality. Little is known of Master Tung* beyond a report that he lived at the end of the twelfth century. In 184 prose passages and 5,263 lines of verse the narrator tells the story of a love affair between Chang, a young Confucian scholar, and Ying-ying, a ravishing damsel. Secondary characters include Ying-ying's shrewd and worldly mother, a general who practices just and efficient administration, and a fighting monk named Fa-ts'ung*. It is based on The Story of Ying-ying by the Tang period author Yuán Chen* (779–831).

As the tale begins, the abbot of a Buddhist monastery responds to Chang's request to rent him a study room, singing:

Sir, you're wrong to offer me rent.
We Buddhists and Confucians are of one family.
As things stand, I can't give you
A place in our dormitory.
But you're welcome to stay
In one of the guest apartments.

As soon as Chang spies Ying-ying, who lives there with her mother, thoughts of studying flee his mind. The course of romance takes a detour, however, when bandits attack the monastery. A prose passage explains:

During the Tang dynasty, troops were stationed in the Pu prefecture. The year of our story, the commander of the garrison, Marshal Hun, died. Because the second-in-command, Ting Wen-ya, did not have firm control of the troops, Flying Tiger Sun, a subordinate general, rebelled with five thousand soldiers. They pillaged and plundered the Pu area. How do I know this to be true? It is corroborated by The Ballad of the True Story of Ying-ying.

As the monks dither, one of them lifts his robe to reveal his "three-foot consecrated sword."

[Prose] Who was this monk? He was none other than Fa-ts'ung. Fa-ts'ung was a descendant of a tribesman from western Shensi. When he was young he took great pleasure in archery, fencing, hunting, and often sneaked into foreign states to steal. He was fierce and courageous. When his parents died, it suddenly became clear to him that the way of the world was frivolous and trivial, so he became a monk in the Temple of Universal Salvation... [Song]

He didn't know how to read sutras;
He didn't know how to follow rituals;
He was neither pure nor chaste
But indomitably courageous...!

Amidst the love story, the ribaldry, and the derring-do, the author implants historical vignettes that mingle fact and fiction. Sophisticates of the Song era, living a life of ease, enjoyed these romanticized portrayals of Tang society.

THE EARLY TANG EMPIRE, 618–755

The reunification of China after centuries of division into small principalities took place under the Sui* dynasty. But after only thirty-four years in power the Sui collapsed in 618, paving the way for the powerful and long-lasting Tang dynasty, just as the Qin, who built the first powerful Chinese state but ruled for only 14 years, influenced their Han successors (see Chapter 2), so Sui practices strongly influenced the Tang.

Tang Origins

In 618 the powerful Li family took advantage of Sui disorder to carve out an empire of similar scale and ambition. They adopted the dynastic name Tang (Map 10.1 on page 272). The brilliant emperor Li Shimin* (r. 627–649) extended his power primarily westward into Inner Asia. Though he and succeeding rulers of the Tang Empire retained many Sui governing practices, they avoided overcentralization by allowing local nobles,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inner Asia</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Northeast Asia</th>
<th>Japan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>600</td>
<td>620–640 Tibetan Empire emerges under Songtsam Gyampo</td>
<td>668 Silla victory in Korea</td>
<td>645–655 Taika era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>744</td>
<td>Ulugh Empire founded</td>
<td>690–705 Wu Zhao reign</td>
<td>710–784 Nara as capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>751</td>
<td>Battle of Talas River</td>
<td>755–763 An Lushan rebellion</td>
<td>752 “Eye-opening” ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800</td>
<td>ca. 850 Buddhist political power secured in Tibet</td>
<td>840 Suppression of Buddhism</td>
<td>794–1185 Helan era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000</td>
<td>879–881 Huang Chao rebellion</td>
<td>907 End of Tang Empire</td>
<td>ca. 950–1180 Fujiwara influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>938 Liao capital at Beijing</td>
<td>916 Liao Empire founded</td>
<td>ca. 1000 The Tale of Genji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>960 Song Empire founded</td>
<td>918 Koryo founded</td>
<td>1185 Kamakura Shogunate founded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1127–1279 Southern Song period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Early Tang Empire, 618–755

Gentry, officials, and religious establishments to exercise significant power (see Diversity and Dominance: Law and Society in China and Japan).

The Tang emperors and nobility descended from the Turkic elites that had built small states in northern China after the Han, as well as from Chinese officials and settlers who had settled there. They continued the Confucian system of examining candidates for bureaucratic office on the classic Confucian texts, a practice that had been reinstated by the Sui. But they also appreciated the Turkic culture of Inner Asia (the part of the Eurasian steppe east of the Pamir Mountains). Some of the most impressive works of Tang sculpture, for example, are large pottery figurines of the horses and two-humped camels used along the Silk Road. In warfare, the Tang combined Chinese weapons—the crossbow
Law and Society in China and Japan

The Tang law code, compiled in the early seventh century, served as the basis for the Tang legal system and as a model for later dynastic law codes. It combined the centralized authority of the imperial government, as visualized in the legalistic tradition dating back to Han times, with Confucian concern for status distinctions and personal relationships. Like contemporary approaches to law in Christian Europe and the Islamic world, it did not fully distinguish between government as a structure of domination and law as an echo of religious and moral values.

Following a Preface, 502 articles, each with several parts, are divided into twelve books. Each article contains a basic ordinance with commentary, subcommentary, and sometimes additional questions. Excerpts from a single article from Book 1, General Principles, follow.

The Ten Abominations

Text: The first is called plotting rebellion.
Subcommentary: The Gongyang [GON-gwang] Commentary states: "The ruler or parent has no harbors [of plots]. If he does have such harborers, he must put them to death." This means that if there are those who harbor rebellious hearts that would harm the ruler or father, he must then put them to death.

The king occupies the most honorable position and receives Heaven's precious decrees. Like Heaven and Earth, he acts to shelter and support, thus serving as the father and mother of the masses. As his children, as his subjects, they must be loyal and filial. Should they dare to cherish wickedness and have rebellious hearts, however, they will run counter to Heaven's constancy and violate human principle. Therefore this is called plotting rebellion.

Text: The second is called plotting great sedition.
Subcommentary: This type of person breaks laws and destroys order, is against traditional norms, and goes contrary to virtue....

Commentary: Plotting great sedition means to plot to destroy the ancestral temples, tombs, or palaces of the reigning house.

Text: The third is called plotting treason.
Subcommentary: The kindness of father and mother is like "great heaven, illimitable."... Let one's heart be like the xiao bird or the jing beast, and then love and respect both cease. Those whose relationship is within the five degrees of mourning are the closest of kin. For them to kill each other is the extreme abomination and the utmost in rebellion, destroying and castigating human principles. Therefore this is called contumacy.

Commentary: Contumacy means to beat or plot to kill [without actually killing] one's paternal grandparents or parents; or to kill one's paternal uncle or their wives, or one's elder brothers or sisters, or one's maternal grandparents, or one's husband, or one's husband's paternal grandparents, or his parents....

Text: The fifth is called depravity.
Subcommentary: This article describes those who are cruel and malicious and who turn their backs on morality. Therefore it is called depravity.

Commentary: Depravity means to kill three members of a single household who have not committed a capital crime, or to dismember someone....

Commentary: The offense also includes the making or keeping of poison or sorcery.

Subcommentary: This means to prepare the poison oneself, or to keep it, or to give it to others in order to harm people. But if the preparation of the poison is not yet completed, this offense does not come under the ten abominations. As to sorcery, there are a great many methods, not all of which can be described.

Text: The sixth is called great irreverence....
Commentary: Great irreverence means to steal the objects of the great sacrifices to the spirits or the carriage or possessions of the emperor.

Text: The seventh is called lack of filiality.
Subcommentary: Serving one's parents well is called filiality. Disobeying them is called lack of filiality.

270
Text: The ninth is called what is not right. . .
Commentary: [This] means to kill one's department head, prefect, or magistrate, or the teacher from whom one has received one's education. . .

Text: The tenth is called incest.
Subcommentary: The Zuo Commentary states: "The woman has her husband's house; the man has his wife's chamber; and there must be no defilement on either side." If this is changed, then there is incest. If one behaves like birds and beasts and introduces licentious associates into one's family, the rules of morality are confused. Therefore this is called incest.
Commentary: This section includes having illicit sexual intercourse with relatives who are of the fourth degree of mourning or closer. . .

In Japan during the same period, Prince Shotoku (573–621), who governed on behalf of the empress Suiko, his aunt, set forth seventeen governing principles: "Prince Shotoku's Constitution." These principles, which continued to influence Japanese government for many centuries, reflect Confucian ideals even though the prince was himself a devout Buddhist. The complete text of six of these principles follows:

I
Harmony is to be valued, and contentiousness avoided. All men are inclined to partisanship and few are truly discerning. Hence there are some who disobey their lords and fathers and who maintain feuds with the neighboring villages. But when those above are harmonious and those below are conciliatory and there is concord in the discussion of all matters, the disposition of affairs comes about naturally. Then what is there that cannot be accomplished?

VIII
Let ministers and functionaries attend the courts early in the morning, and retire late. The business of the state does not admit of remissness, and the whole day is hardly enough for its accomplishment. If, therefore, the attendance at court is late, emergencies cannot be met; if officials retire soon, the work cannot be completed.

IX
Trustworthiness is the foundation of right. In everything let there be trustworthiness, for in this there surely consists the good and the bad, success and failure. If the lord and the vassal trust one another, what is there which cannot be accomplished? If the lord and the vassal do not trust one another, everything without exception ends in failure.

XI
Give clear appreciation to merit and demerit, and deal out to each its due reward or punishment. In these days, reward does not attend upon merit, nor punishment upon crime. Ye high functionaries who have charge of public affairs, let it be your task to make clear reward and punishments.

XIII
Let all persons entrusted with office attend equally to their functions. Owing to their illness or to their being sent on missions, their work may sometimes be neglected. But whenever they become able to attend to business, let them be as accommodating as if they had cognizance of it from before and not hinder public affairs on the score of their not having had to do with them.

XVII
 Matters should not be decided by one person alone. They should be discussed with many others. In small matters, of less consequence, many others need not be consulted. It is only in considering weighty matters, where there is a suspicion that they might miscarry, that many others should be involved in debate and discussion so as to arrive at a reasonable conclusion.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS
1. Why is one of these documents called a law code and the other a constitution?
2. How is the Confucian concern for family relations, duty, and social status differently manifested in the Chinese and Japanese documents?
3. Do these documents seem intended for government officials or for common people?

and armored infantrymen—with Inner Asian expertise in horsemanship and the use of iron stirrups. At their peak, from about 650 to 751, when they were defeated in Central Asia (present-day Kyrgyzstan) by an Arab Muslim army at the Battle of the Talas River, the Tang armies were a formidable force.

Buddhism and the Tang Empire

The Tang rulers followed Inner Asian precedents in their political use of Buddhism. State cults based on Buddhism had flourished in Inner Asia and north China since the fall of the Han. Some interpretations of Buddhist doctrine accorded kings and emperors the spiritual function of welding humankind into a harmonious Buddhist society. Protecting spirits were to help the ruler govern and prevent harm from coming to his people.

Mahayana, or “Great Vehicle,” Buddhism predominated. Mahayana fostered faith in enlightened beings—bodhisattvas—who postpone nirvana (see Chapter 6) to help others achieve enlightenment. This permitted the absorption of local gods and goddesses into Mahayana sainthood and thereby made conversion more attractive to the common people. Mahayana also encouraged translating Buddhist scripture into local languages, and it accepted religious practices not based on written texts. The tremendous reach of Mahayana views, which proved adaptable to different societies and classes of people, invigorated travel, language learning, and cultural exchange.

Early Tang princes competing for political influence enlisted monastic leaders to pray for them, preach on their behalf, counsel aristocrats to support them, and—perhaps most important—contribute monastic wealth.

Mahayana (mah-HAH-YAH-nah)
to their war chests. In return, the monasteries received tax exemptions, land privileges, and gifts.

As the Tang Empire expanded westward, contacts with Central Asia and India increased, and so did the complexity of Buddhist influence throughout China. Chang'an, the Tang capital, became the center of a continent-wide system of communication. Central Asians, Tibetans, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Koreans regularly visited the capital and took away with them the most recent ideas and styles. Thus the Mahayana network connecting Inner Asia and China intersected a vigorous commercial world in which material goods and cultural influences mixed. Though Buddhism and Confucianism proved attractive to many different peoples, regional cultures and identities remained strong, just as regional commitments to Tibetan, Uighur, and other languages and writing systems coexisted with the widespread use of written Chinese. Textiles reflected Persian, Korean, and Vietnamese styles, while influences from every part of Asia appeared in sports, music, and painting. Many historians characterize the Tang Empire as "cosmopolitan" because of its breadth and diversity.

To Chang'an by Land and Sea

The Sui called their new capital Chang'an in honor of the old Han capital nearby in the Wei River Valley (modern Shaanxi province). The Tang retained it as their capital, and it became the hub of Tang communications. Well-maintained roads and water transport connected Chang'an to the coastal towns of south China, most importantly Canton (Guangzhou). Though the 1,100-mile (1771-kilometer) Grand Canal, built by the Sui to link the Yellow River with the Yangzi, did not reach Chang'an, it was a key component of this transportation network. Chang'an became the center of what is often called the tributary system, a type of political relationship dating from Han times by which independent countries acknowledged the Chinese emperor's supremacy. Each tributary state sent regular embassies to the capital to pay tribute (see Chapter 5). As symbols of China's political supremacy, these embassies sometimes meant more to the Chinese than to the tribute-payers, who might see them more as a means of accessing the Chinese trading system.

During the Tang period, Chang'an had something over a million people, only a minority of whom lived in the central city. Most people lived in suburbs that extended beyond the main gates. Others dwelt in separate outlying towns that had special responsibilities like maintaining nearby imperial tombs or operating the imperial resort, where aristocrats relaxed in sunken tile tubs while the steamy waters of natural springs swirled around them.

Foreigners, whether merchants, students, or ambassadors, resided in special compounds in Chang'an and other entrepôts. These included living accommodations and general stores. By the end of the Tang period, West Asians in Chang'an probably numbered over 100,000.

In the main parts of the city, restaurants, inns, temples, mosques, and street stalls along the main thoroughfares kept busy every evening. At curfew, generally between eight and ten o'clock, commoners returned to their neighborhoods, which were enclosed by brick walls and wooden gates that guards locked until dawn to control crime.

Of the many routes converging on Chang'an, the Grand Canal commanded special importance, with its own army patrols, boat design, canal towns, and maintenance budget. It conveyed vital supplies and contributed to the economic and cultural development of eastern China, where later capitals were built within easier reach.

The Tang consolidated Chinese control of the southern coastal region, increasing access to the Indian Ocean and facilitating the spread of Islamic and Jewish influences. A legend credits an uncle of Muhammad with erecting the Red Mosque at Canton in the mid-seventeenth century.

Chinese mariners and shipwrights excelled in compass design and the construction of very large oceangoing vessels. The government took direct responsibility for outfitting grain transport vessels for the Chinese coastal cities and the Grand Canal. Commercial ships, built to sail from south China to the Philippines and Southeast Asia, carried twice as much as contemporary vessels in the Mediterranean Sea (see Chapter 7).

The sea route linking the Red Sea and Persian Gulf with Canton also brought East Asia the "plague of Justinian" (see Chapter 9). Historical sources mention the bubonic plague in Canton and south China in the early 600s. As in certain other parts of the world, the plague bacillus became endemic among rodent populations in parts of southwestern China and thus lingered long after its disappearance in West Asia and Europe. The disease followed trade and embassy routes to Korea, Japan, and Tibet, where initial outbreaks followed the establishment of diplomatic ties in the seventh century.

Trade and Cultural Exchange

The Sui called their new capital Chang'an in honor of the old Han capital nearby in the Wei River Valley (modern Shaanxi province). The Tang retained it as their capital, and it became the hub of Tang communications. Well-maintained roads and water transport connected Chang'an to the coastal towns of south China, most importantly Canton (Guangzhou). Though the 1,100-mile (1771-kilometer) Grand Canal, built by the Sui to link the Yellow River with the Yangzi, did not reach Chang'an, it was a key component of this transportation network. Chang'an became the center of what is often called the tributary system, a type of political relationship dating from Han times by which independent countries acknowledged the Chinese emperor's supremacy. Each tributary state sent regular embassies to the capital to pay tribute (see Chapter 5). As symbols of China's political supremacy, these embassies sometimes meant more to the Chinese than to the tribute-payers, who might see them more as a means of accessing the Chinese trading system.

During the Tang period, Chang'an had something over a million people, only a minority of whom lived in the central city. Most people lived in suburbs that extended beyond the main gates. Others dwelt in separate outlying towns that had special responsibilities like maintaining nearby imperial tombs or operating the imperial resort, where aristocrats relaxed in sunken tile tubs while the steamy waters of natural springs swirled around them.

Foreigners, whether merchants, students, or ambassadors, resided in special compounds in Chang'an and other entrepôts. These included living accommodations and general stores. By the end of the Tang period, West Asians in Chang'an probably numbered over 100,000.

In the main parts of the city, restaurants, inns, temples, mosques, and street stalls along the main thoroughfares kept busy every evening. At curfew, generally between eight and ten o'clock, commoners returned to their neighborhoods, which were enclosed by brick walls and wooden gates that guards locked until dawn to control crime.

Of the many routes converging on Chang'an, the Grand Canal commanded special importance, with its own army patrols, boat design, canal towns, and maintenance budget. It conveyed vital supplies and contributed to the economic and cultural development of eastern China, where later capitals were built within easier reach.

The Tang consolidated Chinese control of the southern coastal region, increasing access to the Indian Ocean and facilitating the spread of Islamic and Jewish influences. A legend credits an uncle of Muhammad with erecting the Red Mosque at Canton in the mid-seventeenth century.

Chinese mariners and shipwrights excelled in compass design and the construction of very large oceangoing vessels. The government took direct responsibility for outfitting grain transport vessels for the Chinese coastal cities and the Grand Canal. Commercial ships, built to sail from south China to the Philippines and Southeast Asia, carried twice as much as contemporary vessels in the Mediterranean Sea (see Chapter 7).

The sea route linking the Red Sea and Persian Gulf with Canton also brought East Asia the "plague of Justinian" (see Chapter 9). Historical sources mention the bubonic plague in Canton and south China in the early 600s. As in certain other parts of the world, the plague bacillus became endemic among rodent populations in parts of southwestern China and thus lingered long after its disappearance in West Asia and Europe. The disease followed trade and embassy routes to Korea, Japan, and Tibet, where initial outbreaks followed the establishment of diplomatic ties in the seventh century.

Influences from Central Asia and the Islamic world introduced lively new motifs to ceramics, painting, and silk designs. Clothing styles changed in north China; working...
people switched from robes to the pants favored by horse-riding Turks from Central Asia. Cotton imported from Central Asia, where production boomed in the early Islamic centuries, gradually replaced hemp in clothes worn by commoners. The Tang court promoted polo, a pastime from the steppes, and followed the Inner Asian tradition of allowing noblewomen to compete.

Various stringed instruments reached China across the Silk Road, along with Turkic folk melodies. Grape wine from West Asia and tea, sugar, and spices from India and Southeast Asia transformed the Chinese diet.

By about the year 1000 the magnitude of exports from Tang territories, facilitated by China’s excellent transportation systems, dwarfed Chinese imports from Europe, West Asia, and South Asia. Stories of ships carrying Chinese exports outnumbering those laden with South Asian, West Asian, European, or African goods by a hundred to one cannot be relied on. Tang exports did, however, tilt the trade balance with both the Central Asia caravan cities and the lands of the Indian Ocean, causing precious metal to flow into China in return for export goods.

China remained the source of superior silks. Tang factories created more and more complex styles, partly to counter foreign competition. China became the sole supplier of porcelain—a fine, durable ceramic made from a special clay—to West Asia. As travel along the Silk Road and to the various ports of the Indian Ocean trading system increased, the economies of seaports and entrepôts involved in the trade—even distant ones—became increasingly commercialized, leading to networks of private traders devising new instruments of credit and finance. As we shall see, these networks would later contribute to the prosperity of the Song era.
Rivals for Power in Inner Asia and China, 600–907

Li Bo, the most renowned Tang poet and one of the greatest ever to write in the Chinese language, wrote in 751 of the seemingly endless succession of wars:

The beacons are always alight, fighting and marching never stop.
Men die in the field, slashing sword to sword;
The horses of the conquered neigh piteously to Heaven.
Crows and hawks peck for human guts,
Carry them in their beaks and hang them on the branches of withered trees.
Captains and soldiers are smeared on the bushes and grass;
The General schemed in vain.
Know therefore that the sword is a cursed thing
which the wise man uses only if he must.2

Between 600 and 751, when the Tang Empire was at its height, the Turkic-speaking Uighurs3 and the Tibetans built large rival states in Inner Asia. The power of the former centered on the basin of the Tarim River, a largely desert area north of Tibet that formed a vital link on the Silk Road. The Tibetan empire at its peak stretched well beyond modern Tibet into northeastern India, southwestern China, and the Tarim Basin. The contest between these states and the Tang for control of the land routes west of China reached a standoff by the end of the period. Mutually beneficial trade required diplomatic accommodation more than political unity. By the mid-800s all three empires were experiencing political decay and military decline. The problems of one aggravated those of the others, since governmental collapse allowed soldiers, criminals, and freebooters to roam without hindrance into neighboring territories.

Centralization and integration being most extensively developed in Tang territory, the impact fell most heavily there. Nothing remained of Tang power but pretense by the early 800s, the period reflected in the original romance of Ying-ying described at the start of this chapter. In the provinces military governors suppressed the rebellion of General An Lushan4, a commander of Sogdian (Central Asian) and Turkic origin, which raged from 755 to 763, and then seized power for themselves.

The nomads of the steppe survived the social disorder and agricultural losses best. The caravan cities that had prospered from overland trade, and that lay at the heart of the Uighur state in the Tarim Basin, had as much to lose as China itself. Eventually, the urban and agricultural economies of Inner Asia and China recovered. In the short term, however, the debilitating contest for power with the Inner Asian states prompted a strong cultural backlash, particularly in China, where disillusionment with northern neighbors combined with social and economic anxieties to fuel an antiforeign movement.

The Uighur and Tibetan Empires

The original homeland of the Turks lay in the northern part of modern Mongolia. After the fall of the Han Empire, Turkic peoples began moving south and west, through Mongolia, then west to Central Asia, on the long migration that eventually brought them to what is today modern Turkey (see Chapter 8). In the seventh century the Tang Emperor Li Shimin took advantage of Turkic disunity to establish control over the Tarim Basin. Yet within a century, a new Turkic group, the Uighurs, had taken much of Inner Asia. Under the Uighurs, caravan cities like Kashgar and Khotan (see Map 10.1) displayed a literate culture with strong ties to both the Islamic world and China. The Uighurs excelled as merchants and as scribes able to transact business in many languages. They adapted the syllabic script of the Sogdians, who lived to the west of them in Central Asia, to writing Turkic. Their flourishing urban culture exhibited a cosmopolitan enthusiasm for Buddhist teachings, religious art derived from northern India, and a mixture of East Asian and Islamic tastes in dress.

Unified Uighur power collapsed after half a century, leaving only Tibet as a rival to the Tang in Inner Asia. A large, stable empire critically positioned where China, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia meet, Tibet experienced a variety of cultural influences. In the seventh century Chinese Buddhists on pilgrimage to India advanced contacts between India and Tibet. The Tibetans derived their alphabet from India, as well as a variety of artistic and architectural styles. India and China both contributed to Tibetan knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, divination, farming, and milling of grain. Islam and the monarchical traditions of Iran became familiar through Central Asian trading connections. The Tibetan royal family favored Greek medicine transmitted through Iran.

Under Li Shimin, cautious friendliness had prevailed between China and Tibet. A Tang princess, called Kongjo by the Tibetans, came to Tibet in 634 to marry the Tibetan king and cement an alliance. She brought Mahayana Buddhism, which combined with the native religion to create a distinctive form of Buddhism. Tibet sent ambassadors

Uighur (WEE-ger) An Lushan (ahn loo-shahn)
and students to the Tang imperial capital. Regular contact and Buddhist influences consolidated the Tang-Tibet relationship for a time. The Tibetan kings encouraged Buddhist religious establishments and prided themselves on being cultural intermediaries between India and China.

Tibet also excelled at war. Horses and armor, techniques borrowed from the Turks, raised Tibetan forces to a level that startled even the Tang. By the late 600s the Tang emperor and the Tibetan king were rivals for religious leadership and political dominance in Inner Asia, and Tibetan power reached into what are now Qinghai, Sichuan, and Xinjiang provinces in China. War weariness affected both empires after 751, however.

In the 800s a new king in Tibet decided to follow the Tang lead and eliminate the political and social influence of the monasteries (see below). He was assassinated by Buddhist monks, and control of the Tibetan royal family passed into the hands of religious leaders. In the centuries that followed down to modern times, monastic domination isolated Tibet from surrounding regions.

Qinghai (ching-bie) Sichuan (suH-chwan) Xinjiang (shin-jee-yahng)

The Tang elites came to see Buddhism as undermining the Confucian idea of the family as the model for the state. The Confucian scholar Han Yu (768–824) spoke powerfully for a return to traditional Confucian practices. In "Memoir on the Bone of Buddha," written to the emperor in 819 on the occasion of ceremonies to receive a bone of the Buddha in the imperial palace, he scornfully disparages the Buddha and his followers:

Now Buddha was a man of the barbarians who did not speak the language of China and wore clothes of a different fashion. His sayings did not concern the ways of our ancient kings, nor did his manner of dress conform to their laws. He understood neither the duties that bind sovereign and subject nor the affections of father and son. If he were still alive today and came to our court by order of his ruler, Your Majesty might condescend to receive him, but . . . he would then be escorted to the borders of the state, dismissed, and not allowed to delude the masses. How then, when he has long been dead, could his rotten bones, the foul and unlucky remains of his body, be rightly admitted to the palace? Confucius said, "Respect spiritual beings, while keeping at a distance from them."
Buddhism was also attacked for encouraging women in politics. Wu Zhao, a woman who had married into the imperial family, seized control of the government in 690 and declared herself emperor. She based her legitimacy on claiming to be a bodhisattva, an enlightened soul who had chosen to remain on earth to lead others to salvation. She also favored Buddhists and Daoists over Confucianists in her court and government.

Later Confucian writers expressed contempt for Wu Zhao and other powerful women, such as the concubine Yang Guifei. Bo Zhuyi, in his poem "Everlasting Requiem," lamented the influence of women at the Tang court, which had caused "the hearts of fathers and mothers everywhere not to value the birth of boys, but the birth of girls." Confucian elites heaped every possible charge on prominent women who offended them, accusing Emperor Wu of grotesque tortures and murders, including tossing the dismembered bodies into wine vats and cauldrons. They blamed Yang Guifei for the outbreak of the An Lushan rebellion in 755.

Serious historians dismiss the stories about Wu Zhao as stereotypical characterizations of "evil" rulers. Fanuchs (castrated palace servants), charged by historians with controlling Chang'an and the Tang court and publicly executing rival bureaucrats, represent a similar stereotype. In fact Wu seems to have ruled effectively and was not deposed until 705, when extreme old age (eighty-plus) incapacitated her. Nevertheless, traditional Chinese historians commonly describe unorthodox rulers and all-powerful women as evil, and the truth about Wu will never be known.

Even Chinese gentry living in safe and prosperous localities associated Buddhism with social ills. People worried about "barbarians" turning their society pointed to Buddhism as evidence of the foreign evil, since it had such strong roots in Inner Asia and Tibet. They claimed that eradicating Buddhist influence would restore the ancient values of hierarchy and social harmony. Because Buddhism shunned earthly ties, monks and nuns severed relations with the secular world in search of enlightenment. They paid no taxes, served in no army. They deprived their families of advantageous marriage alliances and denied descendants to their ancestors. The Confucian elites saw all this as threatening to the family, and to the family estates that underlay the Tang economic and political structure.

In 845 a year of disintegration on many fronts) the government moved to crush the monasteries. An imperial edict of 845 reports the demolition of 4,600 temples and the forcible conversion of 26,500 monks and nuns into ordinary workers. The tax exemption of monasteries had allowed them to purchase land and precious objects and to employ large numbers of serfs. Wealthy believers had given the monasteries large tracts of land, and poor people had flocked to the Buddhist institutions to work as artisans, fieldworkers, cooks, housekeepers, and guards. By the tenth century, hundreds of thousands of people had entered tax-exempt Buddhist institutions. Now an enormous amount of land and 150,000 workers were returned to the tax rolls.

Though some Buddhist cultural centers, such as the cave monasteries at Dunhuang, were protected by local warlords dependent on the favor of Buddhist rulers in Inner Asia, the dissolution of the monasteries was an incalculable loss to China's cultural heritage. Some sculptures and grottoes survived only in defaced form. Wooden temples and façades sheltering great stone carvings burned to the ground. Monasteries became legal again in later times, but Buddhism never recovered the social, political, and cultural influence of early Tang times.

Wu Zhao (woo jow) Yang Guifei (yahng gway-fay) Bo Zhu yi (baw joo-ee) Huang Chao (hwang show)
controlled, his rebellion attracted hundreds of thousands of poor farmers and tenants who could not protect themselves from local bosses, or who sought escape from oppressive landlords or taxes, or who simply did not know what else to do in the deepening chaos. The new hatred of “barbarians” spurred the rebels to murder thousands of foreign residents in Canton and Beijing.

Local warlords finally wiped out the rebels, using the same violent tactics. But Tang society did not find peace. Refugees, migrant workers, and homeless people became common sights in both city and country. Refugees of northern China fled to the southern frontiers as groups from Inner Asia took advantage of the flight of population to move into localities in the north. Though Tang emperors continued to rule in Chang’an until their line was terminated by one of the warlords in 907, they never regained effective power after Huang Chao’s rebellion.

THE EMERGENCE OF EAST ASIA, TO 1200

In the aftermath of the Tang, three new states emerged and competed to inherit its legacy (see Map 10.2). The Liao Empire of the Khitan people, pastoral nomads related to the Mongols living on the northeastern frontier, established their rule in the north. They centered their government on several cities, but the emperors preferred to spend their time in their nomad encampments. In western China, the Minyak people (closely related to the Tibetans) established a second successor state. They called themselves “Tanguts” to show their connection with the former empire. The third state, the Chinese-speaking Song Empire, came into being in 960 in central China.

Online Study Center
Improve Your Grade
Interactive Map:
East Asia in 1000

Competition among these states was unavoidable. They embodied the political ambitions of peoples who spoke very different languages and subscribed to different religious and philosophical systems—Mahayana Buddhism among the Liao, Tibetan Buddhism among the Tanguts, and Confucianism among the Song. The Liao and especially the Tanguts maintained some continuing relationship with Inner and Central Asia, but the Song were cut off. Instead they developed their sea connections with other states in East Asia, West Asia, and Southeast Asia. This effort led to advanced seafaring and sailing technologies. The Song elite shared the late Tang dislike of “barbaric” or “foreign” influences as they tried to cope with multiple enemies that heavily taxed their military capacities.

The Liao and Jin Challenge

The Liao Empire of the Khitan people extended from Siberia to Central Asia, connecting China with societies to the north and west. Variations on the Khitan name became the name for China in these distant regions: “Kirai” for the Mongols, “Khitai” for the Russians, and “Cathay” for those, like contemporaries of the Italian merchant Marco Polo, who reached China from Europe (see Chapter 12).

The Liao rulers prided themselves on their pastoral traditions, the continuing source of their military might, and made no attempt to create a single elite culture. They encouraged Chinese elites to use their own language, study their own classics, and see the emperor through Confucian eyes; and they encouraged other peoples to use their own languages and see the emperor as a champion of Buddhism or as a nomadic leader. On balance, Buddhism far outweighed Confucianism in this and other northern states, where rulers depended on their roles as bodhisattvas or as Buddhist kings to legitimate power. Liao rule lasted from 916 to 1121.

Superb horsemen and archers, the Khitans added siege machines from China and Central Asia to their armory for challenging the Song. In 1005 the Song emperor agreed to a truce that included enormous annual payments in cash and silk to the Liao. This lasted for more than a century, but eventually the Song tired of paying the annual tribute and entered into a secret alliance with the Jurchens of northeastern Asia, who were also chafing under Liao rule. In 1115 the Jurchens destroyed the Liao capital in Mongolia and proclaimed their own empire—the Jin. Then they turned against their former Song ally.

The Jurchens grew rice, millet, and wheat, but they also spent a good deal of time hunting, fishing, and tending livestock. Though their language was unrelated to that of the Khitan, the Jurchens nevertheless learned much from the Khitan about the military arts and political organization. This helped them become formidable enemies of the Song Empire, against whom they mounted an all-out campaign in 1127. They laid siege to the Song capital, Kaifeng, and captured the Song emperor. Within a few years the Song withdrew south of the Yellow River and established a new capital at Hangzhou, leaving central as
well as northern China in Jurchen control (Map 10.3). The Song made annual payments to the Jin Empire to avoid open warfare. Historians generally refer to this period as the “Southern Song” (1127–1279).

**Song Industries**

Historians look upon the Southern Song as the premodern state and society that came closest to initiating an industrial revolution. Divided into three separate states from 907 to 1279, China did not exhibit the military expansionism and exploitation of far-flung networks of communication that had characterized the Tang at their height. Yet many of the advances in technology, medicine, astronomy, and mathematics for which the Song is famous derived from information that had come to China in Tang times, sometimes from very distant places.

Chinese scholars made great strides in the arts of measurement and observation, drawing on the work of Indian and West Asian mathematicians and astronomers who had migrated to the Tang Empire. Song mathematicians introduced the use of fractions, first employing them to describe the phases of the moon. From lunar observations, Song astronomers constructed a very precise calendar and, alone among the world’s astronomers, noted the explosion of the Crab Nebula in 1054. Chinese scholars used their work in astronomy and mathematics to make significant contributions to timekeeping and the development of the compass.

In 1088 the engineer Su Song constructed a gigantic mechanical celestial clock in Kaifeng. Escapement mechanisms for controlling the revolving wheels in water-powered clocks had appeared under the Tang, as had the application of water wheels to weaving and threshing. But this knowledge had not been widely applied. Su Song adapted the escapement and water wheel to his clock, which featured the first known chain-drive mechanism. The clock told the time of day and the day of the month, and it indicated the movement of the moon and certain stars and planets across the night sky. An observation
Map 10.3  Jin and Southern Song Empires, ca. 1200  After 1127 Song abandoned its northern territories to Jin. The Southern Song continued the policy of annual payments—to Jin rather than Liao—and maintained high military preparedness to prevent further invasions.

dock and a mechanically rotated armillary sphere crowned the 60-foot (24-meter) structure.

Song inventors drew on their knowledge of celestial coordinates, particularly the Pole Star, to refine the design of the compass. Long known in China, the magnetic compass shrank in size in Song times and gained a fixed pivot point for the needle, and sometimes even a small protective case with a glass covering. These changes made the compass suitable for seafaring, a use first attested in 1090. The Chinese compass and the Greek astrolabe, introduced later, improved navigation throughout Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean.

Development of the seaworthy compass coincided with new techniques in building China’s main ocean-going ship, the junk. A stern-mounted rudder improved the steering of the large ship in uneasy seas, and watertight bulkheads helped keep it afloat in emergencies. The shipwrights of the Persian Gulf soon copied these features in their ship designs.

Song innovation carried over into military affairs as well, though military pressure from the Liao and Jin Empires remained a serious challenge. The Song fielded an army four times as large as that of the Tang—about 1.25 million men (roughly the size of the present-day army of the United States)—though it occupied less than half the territory of the Tang. Song commanders were specially educated for the task, examined on military subjects, and paid regular salaries.

Because of the need for iron and steel to make weapons, the Song rulers fought their northern rivals for control of iron and coal mines in north China. The volume of Song mining and iron production, which again became a government monopoly in the eleventh century, soared. By the end of that century cast iron production reached about 125,000 tons (113,700 metric tons) annually, putting it on a
par with the output of eighteenth-century Britain. Engineers became skilled at high-temperature metallurgy. They produced steel weapons of unprecedented strength by using enormous bellows, often driven by water wheels, to superheat the molten ore. Military engineers used iron to buttress defensive works because it was impervious to fire or concussion. Armorsers used it in mass-produced body armor (in small, medium, and large sizes). Iron construction also appeared in bridges and small buildings. Mass-production techniques for bronze and ceramics in use in China for nearly two thousand years were adapted to iron casting and assembly.

To counter cavalry assaults, the Song experimented with gunpowder, which they initially used to propel clusters of flaming arrows. During the wars against the Jurchens in the 1100s the Song introduced a new and terrifying weapon. Shells launched from Song fortifications exploded in the midst of the enemy, blowing out shards of iron and dismembering men and horses. The short range of the shells limited them to defensive uses, and they had no major impact on the overall conduct of war.

Despite the continuous military threats and the vigor of Song responses, Song elite culture idealized civil pursuits. Socially, the civil man outranked the military man. Private academies, designed to train young men for the official examinations and develop intellectual interests, became influential in culture and politics. New interpretations of Confucian teachings became so important and influential that the term neo-Confucianism is used for Song and later versions of Confucian thought.

Zhu Xi (1130–1200), the most important early neo-Confucian thinker, wrote in reaction to the many centuries during which Buddhism and Daoism had often overshadowed the precepts of Confucius. He and others worked out a systematic approach to cosmology that focused on the central conception that human nature is moral, rational, and essentially good. To combat the Buddhist dismissal of worldly affairs as a transitory distraction, they reemphasized individual moral and social
responsibility. Their human ideal was the sage, a person who could preserve mental stability and serenity while dealing conscientiously with troubling social problems. Where earlier Confucian thinkers had written about sage kings and political leaders, the neo-Confucians espoused the spiritual idea of universal sagehood, a state that could be achieved through proper study of the new Confucian principles and cosmology.

Despite the vigor and pervasiveness of neo-Confucianism, popular Buddhist sects persisted during the Song. The story from a Song song-strode quoted at the beginning of this chapter contained the line “We Buddhists and Confucians are of one family.” While historically suitable for the time when the original version of the story of Ying-ying was written, before the Tang abolition of the Buddhist monasteries in 845, it is unlikely that the line would have pleased a Song audience if anti-Buddhist feelings had remained so ferocious. Some Buddhists elaborated upon Tang-era folk practices derived from India and Tibet. The best known, Chan Buddhism (known as Zen in Japan and as Son in Korea), asserted that mental discipline alone could win salvation.

Meditation, a key Chan practice, could be employed by Confucians as well as Buddhists. It afforded prospective officials relief from their preparation for civil service examinations, which continued into the Song from the Tang period. Dramatically different from the Han policy of hiring and promoting on the basis of recommendations, Song-style examinations persisted for nearly a thousand years. A large bureaucracy oversaw their design and administration. Test questions, which changed each time the examinations were given, even though they were always based on Confucian classics, often related to economic management or foreign policy.

The examinations had social implications, for hereditary class distinctions meant less than they had in Tang times, when noble lineages played a greater role in the structure of power. The new system recruited the most talented men for government service, whatever their origin. Men from wealthy families, however, succeeded most often. The tests required memorization of classics believed to date from the time of Confucius; preparation consumed so much time that peasant boys could rarely compete.

Success in the examinations brought good marriage prospects, the chance for a high salary, and enormous prestige. Failure could bankrupt a family and ruin a man both socially and psychologically. This put great pressure on candidates, who spent days at a time in tiny, dim, airless examination cells, attempting to produce their answers—in beautiful calligraphy.

Changes in printing, from woodblock to an early form of movable type, allowed cheaper printing of many kinds of informative books and of test materials. The Song government realized that the examination system schooled millions of ambitious young men in Confucian ideals of state service—many times the number who eventually passed the tests. To promote its ideological goals, the government authorized the mass production of preparation books in the years before 1000. Though a man had to be literate to read the preparation books and basic education was still not common, some people of limited means were now able to take the examinations; and a moderate number of candidates entered the Song bureaucracy without noble, gentry, or elite backgrounds.

The availability of printed books changed country life as well, since landlords now had access to expert advice on planting and irrigation techniques, harvesting, tree cultivation, threshing, and weaving. Landlords frequently gathered their tenants and workers to show them illustrated texts and explain their meaning. This dissemination of knowledge, along with new technologies, furthered the development of new agricultural land south of the Yangzi River. Iron implements such as plows and rakes, first used in the Tang era, were adapted to wet-rice cultivation as the population moved south. Landowners and village leaders learned from books how to fight the mosquitoes that carried malaria. Control of the disease became one of the factors encouraging northerners to move south, which led to a sharp increase in population.

The increasing profitability of agriculture caught the attention of some ambitious members of the gentry. Still a frontier for Chinese settlers under the Tang, the south saw increasing concentration of land in the hands of a few wealthy families. In the process, the indigenous inhabitants of the region, related to the modern-day populations of Malaysia, Thailand, and Laos, retreated into the mountains or southward toward Vietnam.

During the 1100s the total population of the Chinese territories, spurred by prosperity, rose above 100 million. An increasing proportion lived in large towns and cities, though the leading Song cities had fewer than a million inhabitants. This still put them among the largest cities in the world.

Health and crowding posed problems in the Song capitals. Multistory wooden apartment houses fronted on narrow streets—sometimes only 4 or 5 feet (1.2 to 1.5 meters) wide—clogged by peddlers or families spending time outdoors. The crush of people called for new techniques in waste management, water supply, and firefighting. Controlling urban rodents and insect infestations improved health and usually kept the bubonic plague isolated in a few rural areas.

In Hangzhou engineers diverted the nearby river to flow through the city, flushing away waste and disease. Arab and European travelers who had firsthand experience with the Song capital, and who were sensitive to the urban
The Emergence of East Asia, to 1200  

Crowding in their own societies, expressed amazement at the way Hangzhou city officials sheltered the densely packed population from danger so that they could enjoy the abundant pleasures of the city: restaurants, parks, bookstores, wine shops, tea houses, theaters, and the various entertainments mentioned at the start of this chapter.

The idea of credit, originating in the robust long-distance trade of the Tang period, spread widely under the Song. Intercity or interregional credit—what the Song called "flying money"—depended on the acceptance of guarantees that the paper could be redeemed for coinage at another location. The public accepted the practice because credit networks tended to be managed by families, so that brothers and cousins were usually honoring each other's certificates.

"Flying money" certificates differed from government-issued paper money, which the Song pioneered. In some years, military expenditures consumed 80 percent of the government budget. The state responded to this financial pressure by distributing paper money. But this made inflation so severe that by the beginning of the 1100s paper money was trading for only 1 percent of its face value. Hard-pressed for revenue to maintain the army, canals, roads, and waterworks, the government eventually withdrew paper money and resorted to tax farming, selling the rights to tax collection to private individuals. Tax farmers made their profit by collecting the maximum amount and sending an agreed-upon smaller sum to the government. This meant exorbitant rates for taxable services, such as tolls.

Rapid economic growth undermined the remaining government monopolies and the traditional strict regulation of business. Now merchants and artisans as well as gentry and officials could make fortunes. With land no longer the only source of wealth, the traditional social hierarchy common to an agricultural economy weakened, while cities, commerce, consumption, and the use of money and credit boomed. Urban life reflected the elite's growing taste for fine fabrics, porcelain, exotic foods, large houses, and exquisite paintings and books. Because the government and traditional elites did not control much of the new commercial and industrial development, historians sometimes describe Song China as "modern," using the term to refer to the era of private capitalism and the growth of an urban middle class in eighteenth-century Europe.

In conjunction with the backlash against Buddhism and revival of Confucianism that began under the Tang and intensified under the Song, women entered a long period of cultural subordination, legal disenfranchisement, and social restriction. Merchants spent long periods away from
home, and many maintained several wives in different locations. Frequently they depended on wives to manage their homes and even their businesses in their absence. But though women took on responsibility for the management of their husbands' property, their own property rights suffered legal erosion. Under Song law, a woman's property automatically passed to her husband, and women could not remarry if their husbands divorced them or died.

The subordination of women proved compatible with Confucianism, and it became fashionable to educate girls just enough to read simplified versions of Confucian philosophy that emphasized the lowly role of women. Modest education made these young women more desirable as companions for the sons of gentry or noble families, and as literate mothers in lower-ranking families aspiring to improve their status. Only rarely did a woman of extremely high station with unusual personal determination, as well as uncommon encouragement from father and husband, manage to acquire extensive education and freedom to pursue the literary arts. The poet Li Qingzhao (1083-1141) acknowledged and made fun of her unusual status as a highly celebrated female writer:

Although I've studied poetry for thirty years
I try to keep my mouth shut and avoid reputation.
Now who is this nosy gentleman talking about my poetry?
Like Yang Ching-chih?  
Who spoke of Hsiang Ssu everywhere he went.5

Her reference is to a hermit poet of the ninth century who was continually and extravagantly praised by a court official, Yang Ching-chih.

Female footbinding first appeared among slave dancers at the Tang court, but it did not become widespread until the Song period. The bindings forced the toes under and toward the heel, so that the bones eventually broke and the woman could not walk on her own. In noble and gentry families, footbinding began between ages five and seven. In less wealthy families, girls worked until they were older, so footbinding began only in a girl's teens.

Many literate men condemned the maiming of innocent girls and the general uselessness of footbinding. Nevertheless, bound feet became a status symbol. By 1200 a
woman with unbound feet had become undesirable in elite circles, and mothers of elite status, or aspiring to such status, almost without exception bound their daughters' feet. They knew that girls with unbound feet faced rejection by society, by prospective husbands, and ultimately by their own families. Working women and the indigenous peoples of the south, where northern practices took a longer time to penetrate, did not practice footbinding. As a consequence, they enjoyed considerably more mobility and economic independence than did elite Chinese women.

**NEW KINGDOMS IN EAST ASIA**

With the rival states to the northeast and northwest strongly oriented toward Buddhism, the best possibilities for expanding the Confucian worldview of the Song lay with newly emerging kingdoms to the east and south. Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, like Song China, depended on agriculture. The cultivation of rice, an increasingly widespread crop, fit well with Confucian social ideas. Tending the young rice plants, irrigating the rice paddies, and managing the harvest required coordination among many village and kin groups and rewarded hierarchy, obedience, and self-discipline.

Since Han times Confucianism had spread through East Asia with the spread of the Chinese writing system. Political ideologies in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam varied somewhat from those of Song China, however. These three East Asian neighbors had first centralized power under ruling houses in the early Tang period, and their state ideologies continued to resemble that of the early Tang, when Buddhism and Confucianism were still seen as compatible.

Government offices in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam went to noble families and did not depend on passing an elaborate set of examinations on Confucian texts. Nevertheless, members of the ruling and landholding elite sought to instill Confucian ideals of hierarchy and harmony among the general population. The elite in every country learned to read Chinese and the Confucian classics, and Chinese characters contributed to locally invented writing systems (see Environment and Technology: Writing in East Asia, 600–1200).

**Korea**

A land of mountains, particularly in the east and north, Korea was largely covered by forest until modern times. Less than 20 percent of the land, mostly in the warmer south, is suitable for agriculture. In the early 500s the dominant landholding families made inherited status—the "bone ranks"—permanent in Silla a kingdom in the southeast of the peninsula. In 668 the larger Koguryo kingdom in the north came to an end after prolonged conflict with the Sui and Tang, and with Tang encouragement, Silla took control of much of the Korean peninsula. Silla could not stand by itself without Tang support, however, so after the fall of the Tang in the early 900s, the ruling house of Koryo from which the modern name "Korea" derives, united the peninsula. At constant threat from the Liao and then the Jin, Koryo pursued amicable relations with Song China. The Koryo kings supported Buddhism and made superb printed editions of Buddhist texts. Woodblock printing exemplifies the technological exchanges that Korea enjoyed with China. The oldest surviving woodblock print in Chinese characters comes from Korea in the middle 700s. Commonly used during the Tang period, woodblock printing required great technical skill. A calligrapher would write the text on thin paper, which would then be pasted upside down on a block of wood. When the paper was wetted, the characters showed through from the back, and an artisan would carve away the wooden surface surrounding each character. A fresh block had to be carved for each printed page. Korean artisans developed their own advances in printing. By Song times, Korean experiments with movable type reached China, where further improvements led to metal or porcelain type from which texts could be cheaply printed.

**Japan**

Japan consists of four main islands and many smaller ones stretching in an arc from as far south as Georgina to as far north as Maine. The nearest point of contact with the Asian mainland lies 100 miles away in southern Korea. In early times Japan was even more mountainous and heavily forested than Korea, and only 11 percent of its land area was suitable for cultivation.

**Online Study Center**

**Improve Your Grade**

**Interactive Map:** East Asia in 1000

Japan's earliest history, like Korea's, comes from Chinese records. In the mid-600s the rulers based at Yamato, on the central plain of Honshu island, implemented the Taika and other reforms, giving the Yamato regime the key features of Tang government, which they knew of through embassies to Chang'an, a legal code, an official variety of Confucianism, and an official reverence for Buddhism. Within a century a centralized government with a complex system of law had emerged, as attested by a massive history in the Confucian style. The Japanese mastered Chinese building techniques.

**Silla (SILL-ah or SHILL-ah)**

**Koryo (KAH-ree-oh)**

**Taika (TIE-kah)**
Writing in East Asia, 600–1200

An ideographic writing system that originated in China became a communications tool throughout East Asia. Variations on this system, based more on depictions of meanings than representations of sound, spread widely by the time of the Sui and Tang Empires. Many East Asian peoples adapted ideographic techniques to writing languages unrelated to Chinese in grammar or sound.

The Vietnamese, Koreans, and Japanese often simplified Chinese characters and associated them with the sounds of their own non-Chinese languages. For instance, the Chinese character 言, meaning “peace” (Fig. 1), was pronounced “an” in Japanese and was familiar as a Chinese character to Confucian scholars in Japan’s Heian (Hay-ahn) period. However, non-scholars simplified the character and used it to write the Japanese sound “a” (Fig. 2). A set of more than thirty of these syllabic symbols adapted from Chinese characters could represent the inflected forms (forms with grammatical endings) of any Japanese word. Murasaki Shikibu used such a syllabic system when she wrote *The Tale of Genji*.

In Vietnam and later in northern Asia, phonetic and ideographic elements combined in new ways. The apparent circles in some chu nom writing from Vietnam (Fig. 3) derive from the Chinese character for “mouth” and indicate a primary sound association for the word. The Khitans, who spoke a language related to Mongolian, developed an ideographic system of their own, inspired by Chinese characters. The Chinese character 王 (Fig. 4), meaning “king, prince, ruler,” was changed to represent the Khitan word for “emperor” by adding an upward stroke representing a “superior” ruler (Fig. 5). Because the system was ideographic, we do not know the pronunciation of this Khitan word. The Khitan character for “God” or “Heaven” adds a top stroke representing the “supreme” ruler or power to the character meaning “ruler” (Fig. 6). Though inspired by Chinese characters, Khitan writings could not be read by anyone who was not specifically educated in them.

The Khitans developed another system to represent the sounds and grammar of their language. They used small, simplified elements arranged within an imaginary frame to indicate the sounds in any word. This idea might have come from the phonetic script used by the Uighurs. Here (Fig. 7) we see the word for horse in a Khitan inscription. Fitting sound elements within a frame also occurred later in hangul, the Korean phonetic system introduced in the 1400s. Here (Fig. 8) we see the two words making up the country name “Korea.”

The Chinese writing system served the Chinese elite well. But peoples speaking unrelated languages continually experimented with the Chinese invention to produce new ways of expressing themselves. Some of the resulting sound-based writing systems remain in common use; others are still being deciphered.
so well that Nara* and Kyoto, Japan’s early capitals, provide invaluable evidence of the wooden architecture long since vanished from China. During the eighth century Japan in some ways surpassed China in Buddhist studies. In 752 dignitaries from all over Mahayana Buddhist Asia gathered at the enormous Todaiji temple, near Nara, to celebrate the “eye-opening” of the “Great Buddha” statue.

Japanese admiration of Chinese culture did not extend to everything, however. Though the Japanese adopted Chinese building styles and some street plans, Japanese cities were built without walls. Unlike China, central Japan was not plagued by constant warfare. Also, the Confucian Mandate of Heaven, which justified dynastic changes, played no role in legitimating Japanese government. The tenno—often called “emperor” in English—belonged to a family believed to have ruled Japan since the beginning of known history. The dynasty never changed. The royal family endured because the emperors seldom wielded political power. A prime minister and the leaders of the native religion, in later times called Shinto, the “way of the gods,” exercised real control.

In 794 the central government moved to Kyoto, usually called by its ancient name, Heian. Legally centralized government lasted there until 1185, though power became decentralized toward the end. Members of the Fujiwara* family—an ancient family of priests, bureaucrats, and warriors—controlled power and protected the emperor. Fujiwara dominance favored men of Confucian learning over the generally illiterate warriors. Noblemen of the Fujiwara period read the Chinese classics, appreciated painting and poetry, and refined their sense of wardrobe and interior decoration.

Pursuit of an aesthetic way of life prompted the Fujiwara nobles to entrust responsibility for local government, policing, and tax collection to their warriors. Though often of humble origins, a small number of warriors had achieved wealth and power by the late 1000s. By the middle 1100s the nobility had lost control, and civil war between rival warrior clans engulfed the capital. Like other East Asian states influenced by Confucianism, the elite families of Fujiwara Japan did not encourage education for women. However, this did not prevent the exceptional woman from having a strong cultural impact. The hero of the celebrated Japanese novel The Tale of Genji, written around the year 1000 by the noblewoman Murasaki Shikibu, remarks: “Women should have a general knowledge of several subjects, but it gives a bad impression if they show themselves to be attached to a particular branch of learning.”

Fujiwara noblewomen lived in near-total isolation, generally spending their time on cultural pursuits and the study of Buddhism. To communicate with their families or among themselves, they depended on writing. The simplified syllabic script that they used represented the Japanese language in its fully inflected form (the Chinese classical script used by Fujiwara men could not do so). Loneliness, free time, and a ready instrument for expression produced an outpouring of poetry, diaries, and storytelling by women of the Fujiwara era. Their best-known achievement, however, remains Murasaki’s portrayal of Fujiwara court culture.

Military values acquired increasing importance during the period 1156–1185, when warfare between rival clans culminated in the establishment of the Kamakura* Shogunate, the first of three decentralized military governments, in eastern Honshu, far from the old religious and political center at Kyoto. The standing of the Fujiwara family fell as nobles and the emperor hurried to accommodate the new warlords. The Tale of the Heike, an anonymously composed thirteenth-century epic account of the clan war, reflects an appreciation of the Buddhist doctrine of the impermanence of worldly things, a view that became common at that time among a new warrior class. This new class, in later times called samurai, eventually absorbed some of the Fujiwara aristocratic values, but the ascendancy of the nonmilitary elite had come to an end.

**Vietnam**

Occupying the coastal regions east of the mountainous spine of mainland Southeast Asia, Vietnam’s economic and political life centered on two fertile river valleys, the Red River in the north and the Mekong in the south. Agriculture was also possible in many smaller coastal areas where streams from the mountains—torrents during the monsoon season—flowed down to the sea. The rice-based agriculture of Vietnam made the region well suited for integration with southern China. As in southern China, the wet climate and hilly terrain of Vietnam demanded expertise in irrigation.

In Tang and Song times the elites of Annam—as the Chinese called early Vietnam—adopted Confucian bureaucratic training. Mahayana Buddhism, and other aspects of Chinese culture. Annamese elites continued to rule in the Tang style after that dynasty’s fall. Annam assumed the name Dai Viet in 936 and maintained good relations with Song China as an independent country.

Champa, located largely in what is now southern Vietnam, rivaled the Dai Viet state. The cultures of India and Malay strongly influenced Champa through the networks of trade and communication that encompassed the Indian Ocean. During the Tang period Champa had hostile relations with Dai Viet, but both kingdoms cooperated with the

---

*Nara* (Nah-rah)  *Fujiwara* (foo-je-Wah-rah)

Kamakura (kah-mah-KOO-rah)  Mekong (may-KONG)

Annam (ahn-nahm)  Dai Viet (die wee-yet)
less threatening Song, the former as a voluntary tributary state. Among the tribute gifts brought to the Song court by Champa emissaries was Champa rice (originally from India). Chinese farmers soon made use of this fast-maturing variety to improve their yields of the essential crop.

Vietnam shared the Confucian interest in hierarchy that was also evident in Korea and Japan, but attitudes toward women, like those in the other two countries, differed from the Chinese model. None of the societies adopted the Chinese practice of footbinding. In Korea strong family alliances that functioned like political and economic organizations allowed women a role in negotiating and disposing of property. Before the adoption of Confucianism, Annamese women had enjoyed higher status than women in China, perhaps because both women and men participated in wet-rice cultivation.

**SUMMARY**

- What is the importance of Inner and Central Asia as a region of interchange during the Tang period?
- What were the effects of the fracturing of power in Central Asia and China?
- How did East Asia develop between the fall of the Tang and 1200?
- To what extent do shared practices justify thinking of East Asia as a unified cultural region in the post-Tang era?

Though the Tang emperors presided over one of the most celebrated periods in Chinese history, they were of Turkic descent and made extensive use of the military and cultural practices of the nomads of Central and Inner Asia. Silk Road trade flourished under the Tang, and the new popularity of Buddhism, coming into China mainly from the northwest, greatly affected Chinese culture. Nevertheless, most of the officials who served the Tang came from long-established aristocratic Chinese families.

After the fall of the Tang, warlords of several different ethnic identities fought for control of northern China, some of them establishing short-lived dynasties. Connections with Central Asia remained important, but a simultaneous flight of people into regions south of the Yangzi River led to the formation of new power centers farther removed from the northwest frontier. The establishment of the Song dynasty for the first time brought political and economic prominence to southern China.

In other parts of East Asia, the Tang remained the model of a powerful empire. But in Korea and Vietnam, the collapse of the Tang made possible a greater degree of local independence. Chinese culture continued to be admired and imitated, but the new ruling families rejected Chinese political influence even while recognizing that China provided the greatest market for their trade.

A reverence for Confucian classics spread from China to all neighboring lands and came to form the core of elite education. Buddhism also spread at both the elite and popular levels. However, neither Buddhism nor Confucianism played as strong a political role in the broader region as Islam did in the Middle East or Christianity in Europe. As a consequence, East Asia emerged during this period as a region with strong cultural links but without a common philosophical or religious tradition of rulership.

**KEY TERMS**

- Li Shimin p. 268
- Tang Empire p. 268
- Grand Canal p. 273
- tributary system p. 273
- bubonic plague p. 273
- Uighurs p. 273
- Tibet p. 275
- Song Empire p. 278
- junk p. 280
- gunpowder p. 281
- neo-Confucianism p. 281
- Zen p. 282
- movable type p. 282
- Koryo p. 285
- Fujiwara p. 287
- Kamakura Shogunate p. 287
- Champa rice p. 288
SUGGESTED READING

On Inner Asia see the suggested reading for Chapter 7 relating to the Silk Road. In addition, Denis Sinor, ed., The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia (1990), and M. S. Asimov and C. E. Bosworth, eds., History of Civilizations of Central Asia, Volume IV—The Age of Achievement, A.D. 750 to the End of the Fifteenth Century—Part Two, the Achievements (2000), contain articles on many topics. Thomas Barfield, The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China (1992), is an anthropologist's view of the broad relationship between pastoralists and agriculturists in the region. Susan Whitfield's Life Along the Silk Road (2001) uses fictional travelers as a narrative device but is solidly based on documentary research.


On the Song there is a large volume of material, particularly relating to technological achievements. For an introduction to the monumental work of Joseph Needham see Science in Traditional China (1981). A classic thesis on Song advancement (and Ming backwardness) is Mark Elvin, The Pattern of the Chinese Past (1973), particularly Part II, Joel Meyers, The Lower of Riches (1990), is a more recent comparative treatment. Agriculture is the special concern of Francesca Bray, The Rice Economies: Technology and Development in Asian Societies (1994).


NOTES